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## THE NEEDS OF MODERN-LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION<sup>1</sup>

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In speaking of the needs of modern-language instruction we must distinguish between college teaching and high-school teaching, for the problems in the two cases are quite different. It is strange to hear people talk about the natural method and the direct method, and other methods intended for the young, and wonder why the college teacher does not employ them. The fact that when men and women get beyond a certain age their memories have grown weaker, their powers of imitation less effective, while their desire to reason about things has grown stronger, seems to be entirely overlooked. In the teaching of any subject the element of age is of great importance, and it is unwise to discuss a method unless you first indicate clearly at what age you expect to have the method applied. Among all the subjects ordinarily taught in our schools this observation is particularly applicable to languages, for two reasons: first, because memory is called on to a greater degree than in any other subject; and second, because in the case of languages we are trying to teach an art and not a science, which is true of no other subject except manual training and English composition.

The study of languages, then, calls primarily for memory and for imitation; it is reasonable, therefore, that it should be pursued at an age when memory is still strong and imitation still comes easy. This seems so simple a principle that one wonders why it is not followed in our American schools. One wonders why the Americans, who pride themselves on their practical good sense, follow the tremendously wasteful system of teaching the elements of modern languages in both the high schools and the colleges. And I say wasteful, not merely because of the duplication of work, but chiefly because we make a student waste time in acquiring, by dint of hard work and wearisome hours, what he could have learned much more easily and in much

<sup>1</sup> Read at a meeting of the Michigan Schoolmasters' Club, March 30, 1911.

shorter time in his high-school course. In other words, the American college is compelled to do work which does not belong within its domain, work which no European university would think of making a part of its regular curriculum.

I know the answer of many high-school men: "We sympathize with what you say, and if all our graduates, or even the majority of our graduates, continued their education in the colleges and the universities there could be little doubt about the course we ought to pursue. But remember that the immense majority of high-school graduates do not enter college, that we must train them for practical life, that what they will need is not language, but mathematics, science, and manual training." Let us grant, for the moment, the utilitarian theory of public education, and let us ask ourselves: How many pupils that do not go on with their school education have any use for algebra in after-life, how many for Euclidian geometry? Does anyone venture to assert that a high-school pupil learns enough of physics, or of chemistry, or of botany, to enable him to become a mechanical engineer of even a low grade, or a chemist, or a florist, or a good farmer? When we come to manual training the case is different. It is possible, in a high school, to train a boy who has mechanical aptitude to become a good carpenter, joiner, smith, or any other kind of skilled mechanic.

You see the utilitarian theory of education would call for little beyond manual training, English composition, and book-keeping. English literature the boy or girl does not need. A man can make a very comfortable living without any knowledge of Shakespeare and Shelley. And so in constructing our high-school course we come back to this principle: that the most practical things are those which best train the mind and hand, and contribute most to the enjoyment of the finer things of life. And what are the things which best train the mind? Don't get alarmed; I am not going to outline a high-school course. Even if I wanted to, I should not do so, as I feel under too great a disadvantage. I shall confine myself to calling your attention to a few statements which have recently come to my knowledge. You all remember the Committee of Ten appointed by the Na-

tional Education Association in 1892, and how it toiled to construct model high-school courses. I was told by a man who labored with this committee that it was interesting to note that when the subject of languages came up each language man was eager to have his particular language taught in the high school, but when the sciences were discussed the science man, as a rule, was perfectly willing to have one of the other sciences taught in the high school, but preferred that his own science be begun in college. To this I may add that there is at least one department of science at Indiana University which would prefer to have its students come to it without having taken the high-school course in that subject. The reason assigned is that most high-school pupils are not sufficiently mature to study the subject, and that they come to college with ideas which have to be unlearned.

Sir Oliver Lodge, the principal of Birmingham University, a school especially strong in its scientific and commercial branches, stated last year that the most crying need of the University was a chair of Greek, and a few months later Professor H. A. Miers, an eminent scientist and principal of the University of London, declared that the best preparation for the study of science was the study of languages. Surely, following the lead of such authorities as these, we are justified in laying down the principle that where, in a high school, authorities have the choice of adding an elementary language or of adding an elementary science, language should have the preference, while in the college the opposite rule should hold.

But what has all this to do with the needs of modern-language instruction? You have perhaps already answered the question. The most urgent need of modern-language instruction is *more time*. I believe that in the high-school course language instruction should predominate, as it does in the corresponding schools of Germany and of France. I believe, too, that the Committee of Ten was right when it said that "any large subject whatever, to yield its training value, must be pursued through several years and be studied from three to five times a week." Every language that is studied in the high schools should be studied at least two years, but preferably three

or four years. Even four years is a short enough time. To me there is nothing more discouraging than to scan the schedules of French *lycées* and German *Gymnasia* and see six or seven years given to a language, while we, the practical Americans, indulge in that most impractical delusion of trying to learn a language in two or three years. To be sure, the high-school course is only four years long; but some voices have been raised advocating the shortening of the grammar-school course by two years and extending the high-school course to six years. Is this only an iridescent dream? Here, I believe, is a chance for some progressive school superintendent in a progressive city to make himself and the city famous; but I am afraid to put off discussing the needs of modern-language instruction until that city reveals itself, lest the modern languages with which I am acquainted may by that time have become ancient.

*Modern Languages* is the subject of my story, but I beg you to believe that I have no quarrel with Latin. I am a believer in Latin; I hope that my children will willingly accept its yoke when their time comes to take it up. I hope, too, that the teaching of Latin will by that time have improved so greatly that they will be able after a study of four years to read it with some degree of fluency. Surely this is not an excessive demand. But I also hope that before that time the modern languages will have been placed on an absolute equality with Latin. And by equality I mean two things: first, that elementary French and German shall be banished from our college course just as elementary Latin is; and second, that pupils shall be given the same opportunity to study French and German as they now have to study Latin. Where a pupil now has the option of studying four years of Latin, three of German, and two of French, as is the case in a few of our high schools, he ought to be allowed to study four years of French, three of German, and two of Latin; or four years of German, three of Latin, and two of French; and so on through the various possible combinations. You see I do not believe it desirable to begin two languages at the same time. This is, I believe, the principle followed in most high schools and colleges. Now it is sometimes argued that inasmuch as Latin is chronologically the first it ought to be

studied first; that of the three languages under discussion it is the most highly inflected, and that for this reason, too, it ought to come first, since such a course will render the study of other inflected languages easier. Then, too, Latin is the basis of French, and so the pupil who has studied Latin will be greatly aided in his study of the modern language. But there are just as many and just as good arguments for the opposite course. To go from the simple to the complex is good pedagogical doctrine; hence it is better to study the less highly inflected languages first and then take up Latin. The chronological argument has by itself little weight, although the fact that Latin is at the root of French and of a great deal of our own language is worthy of consideration. And yet, when we remember that the majority of French words no longer have the meaning which they had in the original Latin and that many words of the classical Latin have left no progeny behind them, the advantages of such a course dwindle to small proportions.

Let us, then, have the modern languages studied side by side with Latin in generous competition with each other, for only in this way can each of them come to its own. The cost of such an arrangement need not be greater than the present one. The high school that now has three teachers devoting all their time to Latin and German can just as well have one teacher of Latin, one of German, and one of French. Once there is true equality established among the languages, the adjustment in the number of pupils is likely to follow. This adjustment may take some time and be accompanied by some annoyance, but the results will amply justify the trouble.

I beg your pardon for dwelling so long on this one point, but the point is worthy of consideration, for it involves not merely the success of modern-language instruction but an important educational principle as well. Much could be said on the desirability of instruction in modern languages, but with this I am not at present concerned, and I refrain from pursuing this line of thought lest I be led too far away from my subject. I proceed, therefore, to speak of some of the other needs of modern-language teaching.

In discussing these other needs we shall not assume that the

ideal just mentioned has been realized, but we shall recognize existing conditions. To begin with, we must recognize the duplication of the work done in the high schools and in the colleges. And yet, while the duplication exists, there should be a line of cleavage. In the high school the linguistic side should be emphasized, in the college the literary side; in other words, each should attempt with its students that which its students can do best. The high-school pupils are hardly ready to appreciate the masterpieces of a foreign literature; the college students have, with a few exceptions, passed beyond the best period of linguistic endeavor, and should hasten to study some of the great literature which awaits them. The high-school pupils can enter more readily into the spirit of the language, and will, therefore, when they are ready to study the literature, read it with a keener zest. They should try to understand the present, they should confine themselves to the language of today, and what literature they read should be recent. In this I am afraid I may not have your assent, but the longer I think of this subject the more firmly convinced I am that in the high schools nothing previous to 1830 should be read. By these restrictions I should not wish to exclude modernized versions of tales and legends. But I should exclude the classic drama, both of France and of Germany. It may be argued that high-school pupils enjoy Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell* and Molière's *Bourgeois gentilhomme*. But the student of German or of French who should imitate the language of *Wilhelm Tell* or of *Le bourgeois gentilhomme* would not be following good models. Imagine a person saying, *Ich will sein ein freier Mensch*, in imitation of *Wir wollen sein ein einzig Volk von Brüdern*. Or, suppose you imitate Monsieur Jourdain's correct seventeenth-century French and say, *Apportez-moi mon chapeau et me donnez mes gants*. In either case you are guilty of a solecism. The high-school pupil's time should be spent in reading and learning correct modern French and German. He should not be allowed to read language which he may not imitate. The same objections hold against poetry. Only a few simple selections, in which the word order is not violated, should be studied. A few songs may profitably be learned, but rather

as an expression of the national spirit than as models for imitation.

For the college student, on the other hand, the problem is quite different. If he has studied French or German thoroughly in the preparatory school he is ready to study the literary masterpieces, and whether their language be archaic or not no longer matters. If he begins the foreign language in college, the linguistic side need not be emphasized, save for the exceptional student, and the content of the literature should be his main object. I beg you to notice that I mentioned the exceptional college student. He should be given a chance. Experience has taught me that every year, out of one hundred and seventy-five to two hundred beginners, there are a few students (four or five, sometimes only two or three) who have real linguistic ability and good minds. It is from such as these that high-school teachers of language should be trained. If put in a class by themselves, they can, without giving more time to the linguistic side than the other students give, be trained to write the language acceptably, to speak it fairly well, and to understand easily the spoken word. Such a course entails from two to four extra hours a week on the department undertaking it, but such an expenditure of energy and money will surely be found to be worth while.

Since it is to the high schools that the modern languages must look for the future, let us consider what ought to be expected of the teacher of German or French in a high school. I suppose we should all agree in chorus that he ought to be well prepared. But what constitutes good preparation? That is the question. It will depend on what the teacher should be expected to do.

First of all, the teacher should have a good pronunciation and should have had some instruction in phonetics. He should know enough about phonetics to understand its application to teaching, and not just enough to want to teach his pupils all the little he knows. The high-school boy or girl does not need instruction in theoretic phonetics. He does need, however, to be taught how to produce the various sounds, and to be told at the proper moment to open his mouth more, to lower his tongue, to draw back

his lips, and so forth. He needs careful instruction in pronunciation at the very beginning, for if he does not learn to pronounce correctly at the outset he never will. It is the one thing that cannot be put off, for every word that he is allowed to pronounce badly is a step backward. True, this instruction in pronunciation is more important for French than it is for German, because French sounds have almost no equivalents in English, and because French orthography is farther removed from the phonetic ideal than German orthography. But let us not imagine that the teacher of German can neglect his phonetics. A high-school instructor, speaking enthusiastically about *Wilhelm Tell*, once said to me: "How beautiful is the line, *Es lächelt der See, er lädet zum Bäde.*" This is enough to make a German's hair stand on end; and yet with two slight alterations the pronunciation would have been tolerable. Doubtless there are teachers of French who sin just as badly. But the point is that teachers of German must not believe too implicitly in the phonetic character of German spelling.

The instructor should be able to speak the language he teaches. It is interesting in this connection to note that in the foreign-language classes of the *Reformschulen* of Germany the language taught is also the medium of instruction. At least, that is the principle by which the reformers are guided; "but," says Dr. Max Walter, one of the leaders in the movement, "we don't want to make a hobby of the principle. If the explanation by means of the foreign language becomes too involved the German word is used, and the pupils are even permitted in this case to jot down the German word in their notebooks." Farther on in the same lecture he says: "The speaking of the foreign language is not an end in itself, but a means to an end, and this end is a more rapid penetration into the foreign language and a better understanding of it." The French, with their tendency to carry everything to a logical conclusion, have gone still farther. In the government schools the use of French in the German and English classes is strictly forbidden, and that, too, from the very beginning. I hasten to add that this ministerial decree is not entirely satisfactory to the teachers, since they find it extremely

difficult to avoid the native tongue in the elementary stages. The fact remains, however, that foreign-language instruction is carried on without the use of the native tongue, and that in the advanced classes this instruction is very good and very satisfactory. In Sweden, too, the direct method, as it is called, has many enthusiastic and successful followers. It has been introduced likewise in Switzerland, where I was fortunate enough to visit the classes of one of its most successful exponents, Herr Alge, of St. Gallen.

Perhaps you think what the Europeans can do we can do also. But can we? There are a few factors which must not be forgotten. To begin with, the European children start their first foreign language at the age of nine or ten; that is, four or five years before our pupils enter the high school. Then they devote six periods a week to the work, and they keep at the same language for at least six years. Finally, let it be remembered that the American child is not required to work so hard as the European child. It is obvious that with such differences of conditions we cannot accomplish as much as the Europeans.

What *can* we accomplish without changing our school system? If the teacher can speak the foreign language, he can begin in the first year, after the pupils have acquired a small vocabulary, to give simple explanations in German or in French. The number and extent of such explanations can be gradually increased, until by the end of the second year three-fourths of the recitation is conducted in the foreign language. In the third year the last vestiges of English should disappear from the teacher's use, and in the fourth year the pupil will hear nothing but French or German in the classroom and will be called on to answer in the foreign tongue questions on the texts read.

Such a plan involves, however, other changes. The number of pages of text to be covered by the class will probably have to be reduced. This will not mean a reduction in the vocabulary acquired by the pupil, but an increase. For while the pupil will see fewer words he will remember more of those that he sees and hears used. The grammar work of the first year will be much the same as at present, but after the first year the grammar

should be based on the texts read. This is, of course, nothing new to many teachers in the East and to some in the West.

But most important of all is the preparation of the work by the teacher. The plan of every recitation must be carefully worked out, and the teacher must see to it that in the apparent lack of system the pupil receives systematic training. He must go back over his notes constantly and see what things he has emphasized in the past and what things remain to be emphasized. It is not sufficient to confine oneself to imitation of the text without emphasizing the grammatical side. Such imitation easily becomes mechanical. The pupils must be constantly called on to express "this" in the singular, in the first person, in the future, in clauses after verbs of saying; they must be called on to complete sentences by inserting the correct form of a noun, adjective, verb, pronoun, and so on, according to the language taught. The vocabulary, too, will need constant watching. Have we come across this word before? Did it have the same meaning? Notice this idiom. Have we had another idiom involving the same noun, adjective, or verb? Here is a verb. Can you mention any compounds formed from this verb? Again, much will depend on the language taught. These questions, too, are to be asked in the foreign language.

Another exercise of great value is telling stories and then having the class tell them again, either orally or in writing. Now and then some of the Gouin series may be introduced, but to teach the whole language by this method I believe to be impossible, on account of its killing monotony.

Now all this means an enormous amount of work for the teacher, at least during the year that a course is given for the first time. But even after the first year the amount of preparation required is very great. For this reason the German advocates of the direct method found themselves compelled to petition for a smaller number of hours of teaching for instructors in foreign languages. I may add that I have some inkling of the work involved, for I have tried off and on all of the things above outlined, except the building up of a vocabulary.

What results may we expect from this combination of the old

method and the direct method? We may expect the pupils to read ordinary French or German prose directly without translating it; to understand the spoken language easily; to write simple, but correct, German or French; and the brighter pupils will surely be able to speak the foreign language well enough to be readily understood.

It is obvious that translation will not be an important part of the course here outlined. Translation from the foreign language into English should not be entirely abandoned. An occasional and unexpected call to translate will prove a healthy stimulus to the pupil who is disposed to shirk an assignment, but translation from English into the foreign language should be gradually abandoned after the first year, and completely dropped after the second. One of the things that I have had to learn, and I confess it took me a long time to learn it, is that in order to speak a foreign language we do not need so much to learn how to translate such and such a word or phrase as to learn what a Frenchman or a German would say under given circumstances. The German, *bitte*, and the French, *je vous en prie*, are not translations of "you're welcome"; they are the expressions that a German and a Frenchman use when you thank them. "Sleep well," a young German said to me repeatedly on parting from me for the night. Now "sleep well" is a correct translation of *schlafen Sie wohl*, but it has, nevertheless, a foreign sound. Every teacher of language knows that one of the ideas that it is hardest to get out of a pupil's head is that every word must have a corresponding word to translate it, especially in translating from English into the foreign language. Imitation of the foreign text is, therefore, greatly to be preferred.

I beg you to notice that I have no desire to pose as the inventor of a new method. I wish merely to indicate that the time is coming when we must make different demands on our language teachers; when the ideal teacher will be one who not merely has a clear understanding of the foreign language but can also speak it readily; and when the goal on which we fix our eyes will be the ability on the part of the pupil to read without translation, to understand the spoken language easily, and to write

simply and correctly. But let me, lest I be misunderstood, state as emphatically as possible that I do not believe in making the ability to speak the language the chief aim. The chief aim should be to give the pupil such a grasp of the language that he can read with zest and understand readily; and only because I believe that this can be best accomplished through the spoken language do I favor the use of the spoken foreign language in the classroom. Let it be remembered that it is possible for one to learn to speak the language of every day without having the ability to read literature. I have come across several cases where young men and women who had been in the Philippines had "picked up" a knowledge of ordinary spoken Spanish and were more helpless before a Spanish literary text than a person who had studied the language for only a year at home. Last fall a young man who had lived in Paris for two years came to Indiana University. He spoke French fluently, though not correctly; but when set to read *Le gendre de Monsieur Poirier* he floundered about helplessly. You see there must be discipline of the mind as well as of the memory and of the imitative faculty, and where, as in the case of the purely conversational method, this discipline is lacking the instruction is worthless. And I use the word "worthless" deliberately. If, on the other hand, the brighter pupils learn also to make themselves understood in the foreign language, then so much the better.

But where are the teachers to come from who are to do this work? Some of them already exist. The plan I have proposed is by no means a new one. In large part it is already followed by a number of teachers, though I know of none who carries out the plan as a whole. Still, I should not be surprised to learn that such teachers exist. But it is certain that the majority of foreign-language teachers would scarcely be ready. This the Europeans found out, too, when they began to shift to the direct method. In some instances teachers were sent to the foreign country at the government's expense. While in Paris the last time I met a young German and a young Swede who had come in that way. Perhaps some of our states will follow the European example. In a few of our universities traveling fellowships for language men already exist. I hope the day will soon come when the state uni-

versities of the West will also be able to offer such prizes. Then there are the exchange teachers whom the Prussian government receives from us and sends to us through the agency of the Carnegie Foundation. Let us hope that the day is not far off when a similar exchange will take place between our country and France.

Once the ideal of the foreign-language teacher who can speak the language he teaches is before us, it will be the duty of the universities to furnish the requisite training, not only on the linguistic side, but on the pedagogic side as well. And I believe it is desirable that this pedagogic training be done by the language departments themselves. Let the stress on method not be too heavy. Let the goal be set before the student, let him be shown the various ways that have been proposed to reach that goal—in other words, let him study methods; but at the same time let him exercise his own ingenuity and individuality in the attempt to reach that goal in his practice teaching. It is a mistake for the professor to map out for his students a model course. Method is important, but it is not all-important. This statement cannot be made too often. Teachers sometimes ask the question: What can we do to make the work interesting? The question is a legitimate one, but in some instances it almost amounts to asking: By what method can I teach with interest what I don't know? The all-important thing is that the teacher have a well-trained and well-stored mind and—above all—that he keep on storing it.

And this leads me to my last point. The teacher should be a constant reader of the literature whose language he is teaching. This seems so self-evident a proposition that you may wonder why I should make it. But I beg you to ask yourselves how many teachers of Latin read widely outside of their college course and outside of the things that they teach. During the four years that I taught Latin in a high school there were two of my Latin colleagues in the same school and one in another high school of the same city who read Latin constantly. Among all the other ten or eleven teachers who were giving instruction in Latin in the high schools of that city I could not discover one who gave evidence of ever looking into a Latin book which was not on his teaching schedule. I do not know whether that particular city

is worse than others in this respect, or whether things have changed materially since 1894, but I do know that I have since then met other teachers of Latin whom I suspected of the same delinquency. And I will whisper into your ear that I have met even teachers of modern languages who did not seem to be very diligent readers of German or French literature. But whatever the facts may be, it is evident that wide reading is desirable. No dictionary, however excellent, can take its place. The teacher who can give an interesting talk of a minute or two on some word or expression, who can tell at length a story which is merely indicated in the notes or which the notes do not mention but which bears on a passage that the class is reading, or who, if he can do nothing else, can point out that a certain story or a certain passage is famous, has a great advantage over the teacher who cannot do these things, has a power of stimulus and inspiration which he could not otherwise have. But that is not all. Increased familiarity with the language means increased facility in reading, which in turn means an increase of intellectual strength; and this intellectual strength that comes from contact with the masterpieces of a literature means capacity for better work, means the stimulus which comes from new ideas, the germination of other ideas within oneself—means a broader and more cheerful spirit. And a teacher whose enthusiasm for the literature of his language has kindled in his pupils a desire to read that literature, who has occasionally given them a peep of the promised land, has done inestimable good. If, moreover, by the investment of a hundred dollars, some hundred volumes of German and French literature within the mental grasp of the pupils can be included in the school library, and the pupils be started on the road to reading foreign literature, the teacher will have reared unto himself a monument more enduring than bronze.

As I come to the end of my discourse I begin to wonder whether I have not been carrying coals to Newcastle, or perhaps, in an assembly like this, I should say owls to Athens. But even if this be the case I shall not grieve. I know from my own experience that a restatement of a question is often useful, and so I hope I may be forgiven if I have said many trite things.